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October 8, 1998

Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary
1919 M Street, Room 222, NW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Sir or Madam:

Enclosed please find my formal comments on behalf of Michigan Government Television in the Matter of Carriage of the Transmissions of Digital Television Broadcast Stations, Amendments to Part 76 of the Commission's Rules, CS Docket No. 98-120.

As I would like these to be circulated to the commissioners, I have attached the original and nine copies per the FCC's instructions on submitting comments.

I would also be happy to furnish these comments on diskette. If you would like a diskette or if you have other questions, please feel free to call me either at the number shown below or on my direct line, (517) 335-7249.

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Bill Trevarthen
Executive Director

Enc.

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Carriage of the Transmissions) CS Docket No. 98-120
of Digital Television Broadcast Stations))
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Amendments to Part 76)
Of the Commission's Rules)

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COMMENTS OF

Michigan Government Television (MGTV)
William C. Trevarthen, Executive Director
111 S. Capitol Ave.,
4th Floor, Romney Building
Lansing, Michigan 48909

I, William C. Trevarthen, file these comments on behalf of Michigan Government Television in my capacity as MGTV's executive director on October 8, 1998, in response to the FCC's Notice of Proposed Rule Making in the matter of Carriage of the Transmissions of Digital Television Broadcast Stations, Amendments to Part 76 of the Commission's Rules, CS Docket No. 98-120.

SUMMARY: Michigan Government Television, a non-profit cable television network covering state government, would very likely suffer serious damage if the FCC gives must carry status to every local broadcaster's digital channels. We would lose our position in the channel line-ups of many of our cable affiliates, and we would find expansion into new systems difficult if not impossible. The resulting revenue loss would certainly be harmful and could be devastating. For these reasons we are opposed to any form of digital must carry status for broadcasters' digital signals.

COMMENTS: Michigan Government Television, a 501 (c) 3 non-profit, non-commercial cable television network, covers all aspects of Michigan's state government, including live coverage of the Michigan House and Senate and the Michigan Supreme Court. We also offer live phone-in programs with state government leaders and taped coverage of House and Senate committee meetings, the State Board of Education meetings, commissions within the Executive Branch, and so forth. In short, we offer cable television viewers in our state something they've never had

before and that no one else offers: an unbiased, unedited look at their state government at work.

MGTV was launched in July of 1996. We are currently offering our programming from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., ET, Monday through Friday, and are reaching nearly one-and-a-half million homes, schools, and businesses served by cable television. Though we are pleased with our success to date and particularly with the amount of carriage we have achieved in the state, we are by no means home free.

We continue to have difficulties finding a place for our programming in the cable channel line-ups in a number of major areas of the state, including Pontiac, Traverse City, and Kalamazoo. The cable systems in these and other areas simply do not have the channel capacity to carry our programming. We have been creative in finding solutions to "channel-locked" lineups in some areas, but not in others.

A ruling that would give must carry status to every local broadcaster's new digital channels would have devastating effects on MGTV. Not only would we fail ever to find a home for our programming in the channel-locked markets I've mentioned above, we would undoubtedly also lose our place in the channel line-ups in many of the areas we already serve. Many homes, schools, and businesses would lose the only direct link they have to Michigan's state government. Furthermore, because we are funded by the fees paid by our cable television subscribers (our charge is five cents per subscriber per month, or sixty cents per year), we could, conceivably, lose so much revenue that we would be driven out of business. I seriously doubt that any other television network would step in to fill the gap left by the loss of our programming.

We feel our programming is not only valuable but also essential. Depressingly low voter turnouts for most elections in the state and nation indicate a dangerous lack of interest and involvement by citizens in their own governments. Cable networks like MGTV (and at the federal level, the C-SPAN networks) work to reverse this trend.

To help build more active citizens, MGTV has made a concerted effort to get our programming into the state's schools, nearly all of which are served by cable television at no charge. We target specific schools for our live phone-in programs (guests have included the Governor, Speaker of the House, Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court, Secretary of State, among others.) Our live coverage of the legislature and the

Supreme Court offers immediacy to the teaching of state government that increases the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of the subject. But we can't help to build better-informed, more active citizens if we aren't on the air!

We feel there is a compelling interest on the government's (specifically, the FCC's) part to preserve networks like MGTV in Michigan and in the many states with similar cable television networks for the public good. These networks provide a direct and comprehensive link to state governments that exists nowhere else. The loss of MGTV or the Pennsylvania Cable Network (our counterpart in Pennsylvania) or any other state government network silences the voices of state legislators and leaders since no other medium will offer the chance for their entire session or press conference or committee or argument to be heard without editing or biased analysis. In this sense, the loss of MGTV could be seen as an abridgement of the right to free speech.

For these reasons, we at MGTV hope the FCC will decide in favor of the "no must carry" approach and not force cable operators to carry the broadcast networks' digital channels.

Submitted by



Michigan Government Television

William C. Trevarthen, Executive Director

111 South Capitol Ave.,

4th Floor, Romney Building, Lansing, MI 48909

October 8, 1998